UNITED NATIONS

World Chronicle

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United Nations General Assembly

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UNITED NATIONS REFORM

Professor Diogo FREITAS DO AMARAL, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, discusses the work of a number of high-level Working Groups concerned with different aspects of United Nations reform. Because of the increase in membership from 58 to 185 States, more equitable representation is needed in the different organs of the United Nations. Three of the Working Groups – those on An Agenda for Peace, An Agenda for Development, and the strengthening of the UN system – are about to reach consensus. In the Working Groups on the financial situation of the UN and Security Council membership reform, agreement is not expected this year. Professor Freitas do Amaral explains the different positions of Member States on these important reform issues.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

As the United Nations enters its second half century, it is faced with a number of political, administrative and financial challenges that are threatening its very existence. To face these challenges, the United Nations system must rise to the task of revitalization and reform through collective efforts. To that end, the United Nations General Assembly has established five high-level open-ended Working Groups to address different aspects of United Nations reforms.

Our guest today, Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, is the Chairman of four of these Working Groups. Joining me to talk with Professor Freitas do Amaral are Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*.

Professor Freitas do Amaral, welcome to World Chronicle.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, some people might argue that the United Nations hasn't done such a bad job in 50 years, despite the problems of the cold war and that some of its activities, or the potential for some of its activities, were limited. Is there really need for these extensive reforms that your Working Groups are now involved in?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Well, I think that the United Nations has done a good job during its first 50 years of existence, with some problems, difficulties, even failures, but also with many success stories. Only to mention some on the democratic side, the democratization process, let us remember Namibia, let us remember Haiti, let us remember the peace process in Mozambique and Angola, which is almost concluded, Cambodia, etc., etc., not to speak of all the humanitarian assistance by the specialized agencies in health affairs, children's education, labour relations, etc. So, on the whole, I think it's –

LITTLEJOHNS: Apartheid, in South Africa, the United Nations was very much instrumental –

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Apartheid, decolonization, etc. I think there is a very good record of the United Nations. But of course 50 years have passed, and the world of today is not the same as it was in 1945. We began in the United Nations with 51 countries; we have now 185. So there is first a need to reshape some organs in order to make a more equitable representation of all membership, and then comes the item of the enlargement of the Security Council, the review of the scale of assessments of the different countries, etc. On the other side –

LITTLEJOHNS: For the budget, contributions to the budget.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: For the budget. On the other side, as all organizations when they grow big, the United Nations is in need of some rethinking on the methods of work, the structure of the Organization, the ways in which it relates to the member countries, to the Bretton Woods institutions, to the NGOs and civil society. We have to be careful not to allow the United Nations to be too big an organization with mismanagement of resources. This is the second reason why we should look at reform. So I think that, despite the good record, there is a good set of reasons to think of reforming the UN.

LITTLEJOHNS: But isn't this reform, Mr. President, being largely driven by the United States, which is calling all the time for reform, is talking about the bloated bureaucracy – which is the standard term – and generally showing a great deal of dissatisfaction with the Organization which is not entirely shared by many of the other members, particularly those from the developing countries?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Well, it is true, I think, that historically it was the United States who first spoke of reform, and, for the United States, reform is mainly the downsizing and streamlining of the Organization, making it less expensive with perhaps less staff making less expenditures. But once they had launched the concept of reform, other countries came with other ideas, and we have at least another two. From many countries around the world, especially from countries of the East, the ex-Soviet Union, they want to reinforce the capacity of the UN to keep the peace. And so they want to reinvest some money, perhaps the money we can spare in the revision of management, in peace-keeping operations. And the developing countries, the non-industrialized countries from the South, want reinvestment in aids to development. And so we have now a process of reform which is trying to combine as harmoniously as possible these three ideas: first of all, to expend less in questions which do not merit the expenditure they are receiving today; second, to reinforce the capability of the UN in peace-keeping operations; third, to reinvest in aids to development to the countries of the South. And we will not have reform if we choose to forget and not to consider these three aspects of the reform.

WILLIAMS: Looking at the General Assembly, it reminds me to some extent of the United States Congress, with lobbies and interest groups making sure that they never give up their patch, and what happens in somebody else's state is always pork-barrelling and what happens to you is genuine need. And you get the same feeling for process. Are these Working Groups a means of sort of trying to get the horse-trading that happens outside of Congress so that these various interest groups – the South, the East and the West – can sort of play off their vested interests against each other?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: At the beginning it is true, it begins always like that. And at the beginning it seems that no agreement will be possible, because everyone is pushing very far for his own interests or ideas or concepts. But there is a kind of mystery, a kind of magic that, in a certain moment, makes it possible for the different countries to agree and to achieve consensus. There is the rule of consensus, that these are not questions to decide by a simple majority vote, and this is the difference towards Congress or any national parliament. Here the rule is consensus. And therefore things are going and the positions of different countries are getting nearer and nearer, and in a certain moment there is agreement. This is the process in which the UN works, and it has worked very, very well in many affairs.

WILLIAMS: But in these Working Groups, has this magic moment arrived yet, that sort of catalytic period when instead of just wallowing around with nothing seemingly happening that suddenly everything's crystallized and a deal is struck?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: I can tell you that out of five Working Groups the magic moment is arriving in three of them. I will mention the Working Group on An Agenda for Peace, the Working Group on An Agenda for Development, and the Working Group on the Strengthening of the UN System. In those three I think that we are very near general consensus on important reforms, and I am hopeful that by the end of the fiftieth session, which means mid-September this year, those three groups will produce substantive reports with recommendations to the General Assembly. On the contrary, we have two Working Groups in which that magic moment has not yet arrived, and I doubt whether it will arrive this year.

LITTLEJOHNS: Maybe not next year. Or the year after!

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Who knows? Perhaps next year –

LITTLEJOHNS: Particularly in the case of the reform of the Security Council.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: I will tell you what I think. And those groups are the reform of the Security Council and the financial situation of the UN. Of course, those are the most difficult questions that we are facing in this process of reform. I am confident that perhaps next year we will begin to see agreement reached on those two questions. I don't expect that agreement to happen this year because, first of all, you have the Russian presidential election in June, and before that the Russian Federation is not able to compromise on essential vital questions; then you have the American presidential election in November, and before that it will be very difficult for the American delegation to be able to compromise on vital essential questions; and then of course you have also China, who normally speaks last among the five permanent members, and therefore will probably want to know what is the position of the United States and of the Russian Federation before they

state their own. So I am not expecting final results this year. But next year, with the Russian and American elections over, and new administrations, and all the five permanent members ready to state their minds, I think that probably we will begin to achieve some progress.

CROSSETTE: In either of those groups where there still is contention, in the Security Council reform and in the financing, after all these meetings, do you ever get a sense, though, that you're coming to some core issues that people do agree on that you could pull out and begin the process of writing a paper, for example, saying this is the way we're going to go? Are there certain things that there's general agreement on with maybe problems over details?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Well, there are some questions on which there is general agreement, but the member countries are not prepared to single out those questions, to make an agreement on those aspects and let the others – they want a global package. But in fact we already have some agreement. For instance, in the Working Group on the reform of the Security Council there is general agreement on ways of improving the methods of work of the Security Council. There is not agreement on the enlargement of the Security Council, and there is not agreement on the right of veto, whether it should be curtailed or extended to other countries. And while there is not agreement on these questions, countries do not want to produce just a reform on the method of work. So we keep it boiling until everything is ready.

On the financial situation, it's more or less the same. There is agreement on the need to review the scale of assessments; there is, I think, the beginning of an agreement on the idea of the United States reducing their contribution, their annual contribution, perhaps from 25 to 20 per cent. That's beginning to become common opinion of at least many countries within the group. There is also agreement on the need to create incentives to pay and disincentives for not paying. But, again, the main problem is that the countries are not prepared to produce a global agreement on the financial situation until they get the real commitment, effective commitment from the United States that they will pay in full and on time their contribution.

WILLIAMS: Isn't that the problem with a consensus, though? If you look at last year, for example, an unrelated issue at the Cairo Population Conference, the need for consensus allowed the Vatican to play the odd one out. And in these crucial issues the United States is the kid in the ballpark who can always run away with the ball and the bat when he doesn't like which way the game is going.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: That's a very interesting question, because there is a debate on what should we understand by "consensus". One school of thought thinks that

consensus means a unanimous decision, and if consensus means a unanimous decision, that will mean that every country will have a right of veto. So if consensus is unanimity, you will have 185 rights of veto within the General Assembly. I think that is bad for the UN. The other school of thought, to which I belong, thinks that consensus means more than two-thirds. If you have more than two-thirds, you have consensus, you have the highest possible majority to approve any major change. Even changes to the Charter of the UN need a two-thirds majority, they do not need a unanimous –

WILLIAMS: Plus the five veto powers.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Plus the five. Yes, of course. Of course. But the point is that there is a certain tendency to try to make consensus equal to unanimous decision. I don't think that is good for the UN. It would paralyse the working of the UN and the decision-making process.

WILLIAMS: Is there a consensus on your interpretation of consensus?

[LAUGHTER]

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Not yet. Not yet.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

CROSSETTE: Could you say a little more about the Security Council? Not the size and composition and the veto. But I think in these years after the cold war, when the Security Council has taken on huge tasks and has been busy round the clock around the year – in fact, so much so that ambassadors say that they've lost the time they used to be able to travel or to do other things that are related to their UN work – I think it's come as a surprise to many people how under-staffed and under-equipped and so on the Security Council is for the job it has. Is this the kind of thing you're talking about when you talk about methods of work also?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: No. In fact, I don't think that we have already addressed that question, although of course I suppose we will, because it's very important. But the kind of thing we are talking about is how to make the work of the Security Council more transparent; how to –

LITTLEJOHNS: More transparent?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: More transparent. And how to make it better known from the other countries which are not members of the Security Council. Here you have an organization with 185 countries of which only 15 belong to the Security Council; the other 170 do not know what's going on in the Security Council. And with the increasing responsibilities and tasks of the Security Council nowadays, the other members want to know what's really going on, what they are deciding, how they have decided this way and not

another way. And for that we need to create mechanisms of participation for the other members, and consultation with other members, and hearings with other members. Something is already being done. The President of the Security Council, which rotates every month, as you know, already has frequent consultations with other members, but it's not yet enough, it's not felt it is enough. So we are looking at ways of making the other countries have a feeling of belonging to the process that goes on within the Security Council.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. President, what about the idea of adding Germany and Japan to the Security Council as permanent members? Is that commanding much support in your Working Group?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Well, this is one of the major items and one of the major difficulties of that Working Group. The initial proposal by the United States and by other countries to have Germany and Japan as permanent members added to the present five –

LITTLEJOHNS: With the power of veto?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Possibly with the power of veto. That proposal has provoked two different reactions. Of course, some countries have supported the idea, but there has been opposition from two different sides. From one side, we have the Non-Aligned Movement, which says, okay, we have nothing against two industrialized, powerful, rich countries becoming permanent members of the Security Council, but we will only approve that if another three countries coming from the non-industrialized South will also become permanent members of the Security Council, namely, one from Latin America, one from Africa, and one from Asia. And so we saw the birth of the formula, so-called formula, "two plus three" – "two" meaning Germany and Japan, and "three" meaning the Southern countries, representing the developing world.

Another reaction came from Italy and Mexico and other countries, who said, no, it is practically impossible that we will have new permanent members. It will not be a good solution, especially if they also will have the right of veto. We would have, in that case, 10 countries with the right of veto, which is not a good thing. The best solution would be to create a third category of members of the Security Council, let the five permanent remain as five, and between the five permanent members and the 10 non-permanent members let us create a third category called semi-permanent or quasi-permanent members, which would enable some countries to be elected for a longer period, say 10 or 15 years each, which would give the opportunity –

LITTLEJOHNS: Instead of the present two. Two years at present.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Yes. Presently, the non-permanent members are elected only for two years, and they cannot be re-elected in the period immediately after they are members. So we would have another category of members which would receive countries

who are prepared, both economically and in terms of human resources, to commit to peace-keeping operations, who would be prepared to give a major contribution to the United Nations. So at this moment we no longer are discussing the initial proposal of having only Germany and Japan as permanent members, we are discussing those two other ideas – "two plus three" permanent members, or no more permanent members but another category of semi-permanent members.

LITTLEJOHNS: Which formula do you think is going to survive?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: I don't know. Until now, I think it is fair to say that neither of those two formulas is getting a two-thirds majority. But this is the reason, of course, why we are still discussing the problem, and I am not sure whether we will finalize this year. Probably not.

WILLIAMS: Doesn't the General Assembly – I mean, the General Assembly has in its hands one particular means of Security Council reform, in that the Charter says that the temporary members should be picked on account of their sort of significant contributions to peace-keeping and peace-making, whereas in fact most of the temporary people are elected on a sort of Buggin's Turn rota principle, going in alphabetical order through the regional groups. Don't you think it's time the General Assembly actually took this in hand and conducted some genuine search missions to find out who are the most appropriate temporary members?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: I think in theory you are probably right, but in practice I don't think that idea will command a majority in the General Assembly. Not a simple majority, even less a two-thirds majority. Because that would mean countries discriminating against countries –

WILLIAMS: Well, it's called elections. [LAUGH]

FREITAS DO AMARAL: Well, but elections –

WILLIAMS: It's not discrimination in other circumstances.

FREITAS DO AMARAL: No, no. Elections for themselves do not guarantee that you will only elect countries who have given major contributions to keep peace-keeping, etc.; elections by themselves do not guarantee that, as we have seen so far. So you would have to have another mechanism of assessment – who is contributing, who is not, who is contributing enough, who is not. And that is, of course, very difficult to establish.

CROSSETTE: Let me bring you back to the financing side of this, the other contentious one. We understand what you said about the elections this year and major Powers and the need to get the P5, the permanent members, on board before you can arrive at your consensus. But, in fact, a country like the United States, or even Russia perhaps, though not China, we realize, would probably benefit from a reassessment, and so they

shouldn't be a problem. Do other countries understand that, perhaps? Or do you agree that perhaps if there were some serious effort to rectify what many people see as really gross anomalies now – so many countries have had their standard of living and their gross national product rising so quickly and yet here we are, for example, with China paying less than Austria as a permanent member – that if there were a gesture in this direction that this might help to take some of the heat off the United Nations from, for example, the United States, or any other country where there's criticism?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: I'm not sure that would be that easy. Because, you see, the United States – of course the United States would be interested in having its contribution reduced, as they already have stated they want to see, from, say, 25 per cent to 20 per cent. But if they are reduced, some countries will have to pay more, unless we can reduce the budget, and that is not very easy to do. Which countries will pay more? Some of them are, of course, more or less naturally indicated to pay more – perhaps the European Union, perhaps the Nordic countries – well-developed countries. But those countries, what they are saying is, we are perhaps prepared to pay a little bit more in the future provided that the United States pays its dues and its arrears. If the United States do not pay their arrears, why should we begin paying more than we ought to pay? So all this is interlinked. And personally I believe that the only way we have to go ahead with the financial normalization of the situation at the UN is for the United States to announce their effective commitment to pay and to present a plan according to which they will pay their arrears. After that happens, I can see the others moving and showing good will to find a solution. Before that happens, I think that nobody will be prepared to move.

WILLIAMS: But, strangely enough, 10 or 15 years ago Olof Palme, the then-Swedish Prime Minister, made the eminently sensible suggestion that a country like the US paying 25 per cent gave it too much power, and suggested reducing it to, I think it was 5 or 10 per cent. And at the time, George Schultz, who was Secretary of State, said this was a terrible idea precisely because it reduced United States power. So are you sure, if it came to the crunch, that the United States mightn't say that we'd much prefer to not pay 25 per cent and have this leverage than to pay 20 per cent?

FREITAS DO AMARAL: It's not for me to speak on behalf of the United States, but I can quote something that happened this year. When the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said that he personally accepted and supported the idea of the United States contribution being reduced from 25 to 20 or even to 15 per cent, because it was not good that one single country had so much power and the Organization would depend so much on one single country, immediately one of the two major candidates for the next American

presidential election said, "20 per cent, I can agree; 15 per cent, never. Because that would be less influence than we want to have."

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Freitas do Amaral, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral, President of the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly. He was interviewed by Ian Williams of the *Tribune* of London and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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